

To the Committee:

My name is Anthony Salvatore, Town Manager for the Town of Cromwell, and until recently, Chief of Police in Cromwell. I am also President of the Board of MCSAAC – the Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council. Tonight I'm here to speak on behalf of Connecticut's Regional Action Councils. **We cannot afford to lose them.**

There is a significant alcohol and drug-abuse problem in Connecticut; that is no secret. There is also a limited amount of money for treatment. Treating addiction is very important; I do not want to diminish that need. But it's my contention that *preventing* people from becoming addicted in the first place is of primary importance. *Preventing* addiction to alcohol, cocaine, painkillers, and heroin is an efficient use of tax dollars, and one that reduces crime and human suffering.

What do I mean by prevention? **Prevention is everything we do to stop the use of drugs *before* a person becomes a full-blown addict.** There are predictable stages to substance abuse. Every addict was once clean. For whatever reason, he or she experimented with a drug, moved to psychological dependency, and wound up physically addicted.

Every step along that path, there were opportunities: opportunities to stop, rethink, avoid the drugs, and find better ways to cope.

Prevention capitalizes on those opportunities.

For example, my organization, MCSAAC, goes into workplaces to show employees how Percocet and heroin are basically the same thing; they hit the brain in the same way. If there's a young man in that employee group with an injured back, he'll have the opportunity to learn the facts, ask questions, and air his concerns. The next time he talks to his doctor about back pain he'll ask about alternative therapies. *That's* prevention.

Or take the teenaged daughter of an alcoholic father. Binge drinking every weekend helps her escape her home environment. MCSAAC trains school staff to use DMHAS' S-BIRT tool (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment). The girl is steered toward an after-school support group for teen drinkers. Years later she's a healthy and successful adult. *That's* prevention.

These are just a few of the dozens of prevention strategies employed by MCSAAC and other Regional Action Councils. Preventing destructive habits is better than treating them. Have you seen the graph of opioid deaths in our state over the past fifteen years? It trends nowhere but straight up. Where will it end? Personally, I don't want to see the expansion of Rushford or Merritt Hall Addiction Services. I don't want Middlesex Hospital to need more addiction doctors. I want to see those numbers come *down*. Prevention strategies are a tested, proven, and inexpensive part of the fight against substance abuse.

The Governor's proposed budget will decimate the prevention infrastructure in Connecticut as we know it. As a town manager, a former chief of police, and a family man, I ask that you not let that happen. **Please restore funding to the Regional Action Councils.**